

# **DEFENSE MECHANISM IN THE TV SERIES *HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER SEASON 1***

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**Abstrak,** *How to Get Away with Murder* yang disutradarai oleh Peter Nowalk adalah sebuah serial televisi Amerika yang menggambarkan kehidupan Annalise Keating sebagai seorang pengacara dan dosen hukum di Amerika. Kehidupan Annalise berubah setelah ia bertemu dengan Wes Gibbins beserta anggota dari Keating's Five lainnya. Tujuan dari skripsi ini adalah untuk menjelaskan dan menganalisis mekanisme pertahanan yang tercermin dalam karakter Annalise Keating dan Wes Gibbins dengan menggunakan teori mekanisme pertahanan Sigmund Freud. Dalam skripsi ini, penyusun menggunakan metode tinjauan pustaka dalam mengumpulkan data yang dibutuhkan untuk mendukung analisis. Penyusun juga menggunakan pendekatan intrinsik untuk menganalisa aspek-aspek intrinsik dan pendekatan psikologi sastra yang meliputi teori psikoanalisis untuk menganalisa aspek-aspek ekstrinsik. Sebagai hasil dari skripsi ini, Annalise Keating dan Wes Gibbins menjalankan beberapa tipe mekanisme pertahanan seperti rasionalisasi, regresi, represi, penyangkalan dan proyeksi dalam serial TV ini. Hal ini dapat dibuktikan di banyak adegan yang menunjukkan bagaimana Annalise dan Wes mengurangi kecemasan-kecemasan mereka dengan menjalankan mekanisme pertahanan.

Kata kunci: mekanisme pertahanan, psikologi sastra, kecemasan-kecemasan.

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

People have to face many kind of problems in life. The problems may cause many things. One of them is anxiety. Anxiety appears not only from traumatic events in reality but also appears from people's psychological minds. When people cannot manage anxiety, it will haunt them and make them feel uncomfortable. Anxiety must be avoided. So, people who get the feeling of anxiety in their life will create a defense mechanism to get rid of the anxiety. According to the book *The Development of Defense Mechanism*, Cramer explains about defense mechanism as below.

Defense mechanisms are "constructs that denote a way of functioning of the mind" (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 222), while "defenses ... are the specific behaviors, affects or ideas that serve defensive purposes" (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 222). There is general agreement that the purpose of the defenses is to prevent other ego functions from being disrupted or disorganized by excessive negative affect, such as anxiety or guilt. (Cramer, 1991:3)

The explanation states that defense mechanism happens in the human's mind. People with anxiety did not try to make defense mechanism but it appears as a construction of the mind. Furthermore, Schultz and Ellen explain that "Although defense mechanisms vary in their specifics, they share two characteristics: (1) they are denials or distortions of reality—necessary ones, but distortions nonetheless, and, (2) they operate unconsciously..." (2009:61). From the explanation, it can be concluded that defense mechanism operates conscious and unconsciously.

The writer chooses American television series entitled *How to Get Away with Murder Season 1* (from now on it is abbreviated into *HGAM*) as the object of this thesis because it shows us how the characters use defense mechanism in their lives. *HGAM* is directed by Peter Nowalk. It was produced under Rhimes Shondaland production company and aired in ABC. *HGAM (2014)* is American drama television series that shows us a lot of conflicts. The TV series focuses on the main character which is Annalise Keating with her two assistants and her five students. They have to solve a lot of cases because Annalise is a professional and popular defense attorney in America. The television series is complicated because the audience will see many cases with a lot of tricks on it. Annalise and her team work to win their clients from murder cases. However, Annalise and her team have to be involved in a real murder case as killers. They show their defense mechanism in order to deny what they have done.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a. Freudian Defense Mechanism**

When people experience anxiety in their lives, they will make a protection to defend the anxiety. At first, they may use rational actions in order to decrease anxiety. However, several anxieties that people have to face in their lives cannot disappear only with rational actions. So, they will make a defense mechanism which is categorized as an irrational action to fight against anxiety. The writer provides the meaning of defense mechanism from Sigmund Freud as below.

According to Freud a defense mechanism was that of a counterforce directed against the expression of drives and impulses. The idea here was that defenses served to control or modulate impulse expression to protect the individual from being overwhelmed by the anxiety that would result from conscious recognition of unacceptable impulses. This conception was subsequently expanded to include the use of defenses as reactions to external sources of stress as well as to internal forces (i.e., drives) (2009:61).

Then, the writer will describe several Freudian defense mechanisms that connect with this thesis in order to make this thesis easy to understand. The writer chooses five Freudian defense mechanisms that occur in HGAM.

**A. Rationalization,** According to Freud in the book *Theory of Personality* (2009) rationalization is a defense mechanism that involves reinterpreting our behavior to make it seem more rational and acceptable to us. We excuse or justify a threatening thought or action by persuading ourselves there is a rational explanation for it (Schultz, 2009:62-63).

**B. Regression,** regression happens when people have to suffer the most frustrating and depressing problems in live. The depression brings them to escape the reality by reminiscing the past moment when there is no depression. It will make them back to the childhood time. People with the highest stage of depression will claim themselves as a childish creature. They will act like a child.

**C. Repression,** “Repression is an involuntary removal of something from conscious awareness. It is an unconscious type of forgetting of the existence of something that brings us discomfort or pain..” (Schultz, 2009:62). Repression is an effort to destroy painful experience from people’s mind. As a result of this, repression will make people with anxiety feel more safety. They also can continue their lives without thinking about their mistakes.

**D. Denial,** The defense mechanism of denial is related to repression and involves denying the existence of some external threat or traumatic event that has occurred (2009:62). This defense occurs when people cannot accept something that has happened to them. It means that they cannot accept reality.

#### **E. Projection**

Another way of defending against disturbing impulses is to attribute them to someone else. This defense mechanism is called projection. Lustful, aggressive, and other unacceptable impulses are seen as being possessed by other people, not by oneself. The person says, in effect, “I don’t hate him. He hates me.” Or a mother may ascribe her sex drive to her adolescent daughter. The impulse is still manifested, but in a way that is less threatening to the individual (Schultz, 2009:62).

Projection may be defined as a defense mechanism to defense or protect people from impulses that disturb them, and then they can attribute those impules to other people.

#### **C. METHODS OF THE STUDY**

In this paper, the writer uses intrinsic approach to analyze the intrinsic aspect and psychology of literature approach to analyze the extrinsic aspect. Intrinsic approach consists of narrative elements that include theme, character, setting and plot and cinematographie elements that include distance, mise-en-scene and sound.

As for extrinsic aspect, the writer uses psychology of literature approach. The theory that will be used is psychoanalytic theory. Psychology of literature is used in this study in order to support the analysis of this thesis. Psychoanalytic theory is a theory that studies human's personality. This theory was declared by Sigmund Freud. Schultz and Ellen said that "Psychoanalysis as Freud conceived it emphasized unconscious forces, biologically based drives of sex and aggression, and unavoidable conflicts in early childhood. These were considered the rulers and shapers of our personality."(2009:45). So, it can be understood that there are various aspects that form personality. In this approach, the writer uses one of Freud's psychoanalytic theory which is called defense mechanism. This theory is used to analyze defense mechanism in the characters Annalise Keating and Wes Gibbins in *HGAM Season 1*.

## **D. ANALYSIS**

### **I. INTRINSIC ASPECT**

#### **I.1 THEME**

*How to Get Away with Murder* is a television series that portrays the life of Annalise Keating, her team and her students. Betrayal and priority appear as a theme in this TV series. In the early episode of *HGAM* the audience can see the betrayal from an affair that happens between Annalise and Nate Lahey. Annalise is not the only person who has an affair in this TV series because Annalise's husband also has an affair with his student named Lila Stangard. This affair is the greatest disaster for Annalise's life. It also affects the whole story of this TV

series. Annalise's curiosity about her husband's involvement in Lila's murder case leads her to an unexpected experience. As the consequence, Annalise has to find the way to survive.

Priority also appears as a theme in *HGAM*. Annalise's priority in this TV series is to keep and protect her students from everything that happens to them. Because Annalise wants to keep their happiness, she has to sacrifice her life. She never cares about her own life and happiness. Annalise also does not care about her husband's life. Her priority makes her trapped in the situation where she can not even show her sorrow of losing Sam. It also causes inner conflict within herself. This conflict leads her to depression. Annalise must forget her personal interest in order to help Keating's five students cover their mistake.

## II. EXTRINSIC ASPECT

### II.1 RATIONALIZATION

When Annalise says "...It's version of the truth that makes the most sense and will let us to move on" (*HGAM*, Eps.15, 01:17:21-01:18:05), Annalise reinterprets her behavior to make kills someone seems more rational and can be accepted. Before Wes kills Sam, Annalise believes that kills someone is a mistake. However when something terrible happens to Wes, Annalise changes her opinion so Wes' mistake can be accepted. Annalise action is categorized as rationalization because her action is in accordance with the definition of rationalization in page 23. "It" on the previous quotation refers to the truth about Sam's involvement in Lila's murder case. Although Annalise said that Sam's involvement in Lila's death as her own version of the truth, she keeps believing that Sam kills Lila. She also makes that belief as a rational reason for everything that Wes does to Sam. This belief will make them move on from everything that happens to them. Then, Wes follows Annalise's command to believe the truth that Sam kills Lila. In the dialogue, Annalise and Wes repeatedly say that "Sam killed Lila.... Sam killed Lila" (*HGAM*, Eps 15, 00:19:01). This action will make them avoid their anxieties of Sam's death because Sam kills Lila.

## II. II REGRESSION

It happens when Annalise's mother hugs Annalise because Annalise does not want to wake up from her bed. Annalise's mother says "It's alright baby. Come on. Mama's here now and everything is gonna be alright, right?" (*HGAM*, Eps.13, 00:04:24-00:04:37) and Annalise only cries and hugs her mother. This scene really portrays how Annalise performs regression. Annalise shows regression by manifesting behaviors such as childish and dependant behavior. Annalise is crying in front of her mother. Crying is an action that can be categorized as childish behavior. She also cannot do anything to avoid her anxiety. In this scene, it seems that Annalise only needs protection from her mother. It also can be categorized as dependant behavior. Annalise gives up on everything that happens to her. Before this happens, Annalise never does this in her adult life. She used to solve her problems alone. Regression affects Annalise to reduce the anxiety. Annalise thinks there is someone who will protect her. Annalise escapes from the reality to the past memory of her childhood.

Then, her mother gives an advice to make Annalise stronger in facing her problems. Annalise's mother says "All I know how... how you've been torturing yourself about what went on there, baby. And maybe you did something real bad. I don't know and don't much care if you did. I know if you did, you had your reason. 'Cause sometimes you got to do what you got to do. Even if all you've got is a long match." (*HGAM*, Eps.13, 00:35:40-00:00:36:05) and Annalise is back to the stage where she always listens to the advice that are given by her mother. That is a proof tht Annalise is doing regression. As the effect of regression, Annalise can relieve her pain of losing Sam and reduce her anxieties. It is because she will think that she does not have any responsibility for everything that happens. Regression also happens when Annalise is taking a boiled chicken with her hands.

## II. III REPRESSSION

Connor is afraid if Annalise cannot help them to prove Sam is Lila's murderer. Connor is also afraid if he becomes suspect and goes to jail. However, Wes seems to be calm to face the reality. When Wes said that "Everyone needs to calm down. Let's just focus on this case like we would any other" (*HGAM*, Eps.10, 00:15:45-00:15:56) he represses the memory of his mistake as Sam's murderer. Wes can focus on another important thing. He has more

concentration on solving the case that has given by Annalise. This action is defined as repression because Wes can forget that unpleasant experience that haunts him every time.

Wes represses the reality that he has killed Sam. He represses his unpleasant experience by focusing on defenses to prove that Rebecca did not kill Lila. It can be proven in Wes' statement to the D.A. in episode 10 minute 00:10:00 to minute 00:10:05. Wes says "I never really paid much attention to him, to be honest. I was more focus on preparing Rebecca Sutter's defense for trial" (*HGAM*, Eps.10, 00:10:00-00:10:05). From Wes' utterance it can be concluded that Wes is doing repression. As the effect of repression Wes can reduce his anxiety and his guilty feeling and he can focus on helping Rebecca out of jail and proving that Sam has killed Lila.

## II. IV DENIAL

When Annalise said "I'm not ready to get rid of his things just yet" (*HGAM*, Eps.13, 00:10:01:00:00:10:05), it means that she is not ready to let everything about Sam go. She also denies that Sam has died. It is a proof that Annalise is doing denial. Her action also reveals her sorrow of losing Sam. Annalise' unwillingness leads her to keep everything that connects with Sam. This action affects her to reduce her anxiety. The action that she takes shows us how Annalise is regretting what had happened to Sam. As an effect, she is showing denial. Her denial eases her guilty feeling and anxiety within herself. Annalise keeps Sam's place unchanged because it is the only thing that she can do. As the effect, Annalise feels better and she can reduce the anxiety within herself. Annalise can also continue her life without always thinking about her mistake.

## II.V PROJECTION

Wes projects his fault to Rebecca. Rebecca says "Yeah, then he turned in on me" when Connor said that everything that Wes does is to help Rebecca. Rebecca's utterance proves that Wes is doing projection. He projects his mistake to Rebecca. It also can be proven that Wes is doing projection in many scenes where Wes always suspicious about Rebecca's involvement in Lila's death. He investigates Rudy in Enfield Behavioral Hospital in order to know the fact that Rebecca kills Lila. Wes also accuses Rebecca of being the cause of

everything that has occurred to him. Wes bestows his fault to others so that he can destroy his guilty feeling within himself. From this action, the audience will know that Wes is still trying to find a way to defend himself. Projection changes Wes' way of thinking. Wes does not focus on his fault anymore. He focuses on proving that Rebecca is guilty.

#### E. CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that Annalise Keating and Wes Gibbins show defense mechanism in the TV series *How to Get Away with Murder Season 1*. Defense mechanism that appears in Annalise and Wes are rationalization, regression, repression, denial, and projection. As the result of defense mechanism, they can continue their live without thinking about the anxieties. Defense mechanism also changes their ways of thinking. It really helps them to reduce anxiety.

#### F. REFERENCE

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